While Waiting for the Red Spectacles Nights 1-5

While Waiting for the Red Spectacles Night One:

"The Night of Cerberus—The Rise and Fall of the Armored Detective"

Theme Song

The distant howling of dogs overlapped—

Narrator: Late 20th century. To combat the surge in urban crime and its increasing viciousness, the Metropolitan Police Department established the Special Armed Mobile Task Force for Combating Violent Crimes in the Capital Area within its ranks. Members were selected from among police officers for their superior intellect and physical strength, and especially their strong sense of justice. Armed with special reinforced suits and heavy firearms, they became known by the nickname “Hellhound Cerberus” and began their bold challenge against the criminal underworld.

However, Their zeal in combating crime bordered on cruelty, and criticism mounted over their ruthless investigative tactics. Then, when a member of the special investigation unit killed a petty criminal, the organization's dissolution became inevitable...

Written by Shiozawa Shōbei

A Comprehensive History of Criminal Police Agencies

Chapter 4: Excerpt from "The Struggle Against Violent Crime: The Rise and Fall of the Armored Police"

The exhaust sound of the Z-type engine revving

AIRPORT

Announcer: Attention passengers: For flight KYA-007 to Agul, please proceed to Gate 15 for boarding.

wind blows through the trees

Voices over radio communication:
Voice A: Scheduled report: Alpha reporting nothing.

Voice B: Group Bravo, reports no abnormalities.

Voice C (Young agent) West section C team, all clear

Voice D: Roger. All teams stand by until further notice. Continue forward movement.

The wind picks up

YOUNG AGENT: How sad, Must I really endure this cold just to wait for a man?

HUNGRY AGENT: I’m hungry

LAZY AGENT: Do you think we’ll get any overtime out of this?

Young Agent: Not likely... Not likely...

Hungry Agent: I’m hungry

Lazy Agent: I’m going to quit for real this time... this job.

Older Agent: Damn it, you guys are hopeless . We're about to face a piece of history tonight. And yet all you can think about is how cold you are, how hungry you are, how empty you are.

Young agent: But Sir——

Older agent: Listen Up, If you've read Muroto Bunmei's "Understanding Criminal Tendencies and Countermeasures: A Must-Have Guide for Police Officers," you should have a pretty good idea of what kind of man D-666—aka Totsume Kōichi—is, the internationally wanted criminal returning to Japan tonight after three years.

Hungry agent: I don’t understand

Younger agent: The sorrow that I have long forgotten, And the steam from the whistle that echoed at the station— Where are they now?

Older agent. [Utterly Fed Up]: You two, Can't you even recall the Kerberos incident?

Narrator: the Kerberos incident: that is… was a rebellion by the young members of the Special Investigation Unit who, resisting its dissolution, sought to uphold their sense of justice to the very end.

June 1995: On the night the Special Investigation Unit's disbandment was decided, the armoured detectives refused to disarm and rose up en masse. Using this momentum, they swiftly seized control of the Public Prosecutor's Office and other key locations.

However, faced with the authorities' overwhelming force, the various units were surrounded and cut off, losing their strongholds one after another. Thus, their long, hot summer, spanning 45 days since the start of the uprising, was coming to an end.

But…

* Engine noise, tyre skid marks, scraping upwards*

Radio Voice A: "First-level emergency measures declared for the metropolitan Tokyo area. Commencing unrestricted search operations at 01:00."

Radio Voice B: "Objective is to force a breakthrough at the third checkpoint. Currently heading north on National Route 109."

Radio Voice C: "The fugitives have been identified as Senior Detectives: Totsume Kouichi, Toribe Souichirou, and Washio Midori of Kerberos First Squad. All are wearing reinforced suits and carrying heavy firearms. Exercise extreme caution. Shoot on sight upon discovery. I repeat..."

fade out

Wind

Airport intercom: (barely audible) May I have your attention please...

Older agent: The vanguards: “Death God Ao”, “Fortune Teller Kōichi”, and the number-one Sniper “Shooting Gallery Midori” ———
the glorious Cerberus First Squad's “Devil Trio” just their name alone made any criminal tremble in fear. Truly a trinity, their combined skill was flawless. Like the three-headed dog on that emblem, the incarnation of Cerberus, Hell’s guardian hound...

Yet even with their formidable combat prowess, breaking through the security forces' encirclement proved impossible. Soichiro and Midori fell wounded, leaving only Totsume Kouichi to escape abroad... vowing to preserve the bloodline of Cerberus and return to this city one day for a reunion.

Younger Agent: "In short, He abandoned his comrades, didn't he?"

Older Agent.: How could you possibly know what their parting was like? ...For the remaining squad members, Totsume Kouichi was a beacon of hope. But time is cruel... With all convictions finalised, both Toriabe Sōichirō and Washio Midori became prisoners. Stripped of their power suits, they were more fragile than a crab that had just shed its shell. One by one, they dug a hole that fit their own shell and crawled inside. Nowadays, the only ones left looking for Totsume Kōichi are us Public Security Bureau officers.

Hungry agent: He's not exactly the sharpest tool in the box, is he? He'd be better off living happily abroad instead of deliberately coming back here to get caught.

Younger agent: If he did that, he’d save us the trouble of being out in this damn cold.

Hungry agent: I’m hungry

Older agent: That's why you lot are cats. Seeking only pleasure, lazy, forgetting everything after three steps. You don't even remember the pain from three years ago. It's not some distant historical tale; three years ago is barely the day before yesterday.

Younger agent: Hold on! hold on!

Hungry agent: What nonsense

Older agent.: Tonight, a genuine dog is coming home. Having left the organisation, become a stray, and crossed the border... what will that dog get up to in this cat town? I want to see it for myself.

* Riding on the wind, the dog's bark comes in broken snatches*

Theme songs fades in

Narrator: That stray dog, one of a kind, cast adrift by the times, bearing that tumultuous memory in him. Who shall place the silver bell around his lowered neck? Now, the long night begins for the cats...

Theme Song

While Waiting for the Red Spectacles Night Two:

"The Night of Cerberus—The Dog's Name is Totsume Kōichi"

The receding roar of jet engines

Intercom Announcement:
Cat Airline Flight 007 to Agaru Evening will soon close boarding. Passengers traveling on this flight, please proceed to Gate 15...

Blowing Wind

Younger agent: Come on, Flight 703!

Lazy agent: It’s freezing

Hungry agent: I’m Hungry

Younger agent: Hey, do you have any stories to take my mind off things?

Older agent.: What the hell are you doing, trying to distract me?! We must focus our minds on this man—the man who possesses nothing but himself, the man who crossed borders as a stray dog, the last of the Cerberus, Totsume Kōichi!

Younger agent: the spirit... that’s death talk (death sentence?)

Hungry agent: If I concentrate before the arrival, I'll get tired.

Lazy agent: Besides, telling me to focus on some random guy I don't even know...

Older agent.: Hey... is anyone holding the pocket edition of Muroto Bunmei's "Easy-to-Understand Criminal Profiles and Countermeasures"? His profile should be in the appendix at the end of that book...
Huh?
Lend it to me for a sec.

older agent. turns a few pages

Older agent.: Got it. Listen... (takes a deep breath) Totsume Kōichi, born August 8, 1968, Leo, blood type O. Height 165 cm...

Narrator: Weight: 51 kg, estimated output: 250 horsepower gross. After graduating at the top of his class from the Central High Police Academy, he completed his training at the Metropolitan Police Headquarters with outstanding results. He then re-enrolled in the Metropolitan Area Special Armed Mobile Task Force for Violent Crimes Training Academy, commonly known as the “Cerberus Academy”.

After completing the 16-week program, assigned to the First Assault Squad, First Battalion, First District.
Post-assignment performance evaluations: 7 Commissioner General Awards. Five Special Merit Awards. Eight formal reprimands. Three suspensions from duty.

Possessing a strong sense of justice, his investigative and combat abilities are particularly

noteworthy. However, he has a pronounced tendency to deviate from regulations and requires strict supervision. Teaming up with the squad's vanguard, Sōichi Toribe, and primary sniper, Midori Washio, he forms an unbeatable combination feared by criminals and renowned for their valor.

However, due to numerous acts of insubordination and disobedience toward the commander, they were marked as a high risk group that required special attention within the battalion. When the Special Investigation Unit was disbanded, they refused disarmament and were regarded as central figures in the group that rose up. Yet, they did not join the group that occupied the main headquarters building. Instead, they seized the unit's vehicles and fled with the two squad members. They attempted to break through the blockade and flee the country via the port area, but both Toriabe Sōichirō and Washio Midori were wounded. Only Tsumeme Kōichi escaped via Hēri, boarding an unidentified cargo ship on the high seas. Their subsequent escape route and whereabouts remain unknown, though sightings have been reported in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Taipei, and other locations.

A “Special Investigative Unit” Duty officer wears Type 94 Special Armor Reinforced Suit Type B, proficient in all firearms and explosives. Preferred equipment for missions includes the MG34, Mauser Military 9mm caliber Mauser Hsc, tonfa, nunchaku, and okonomiyaki spatula. Holds 5th dan in Judo, 4th dan in Aikido, 3rd dan in Kendo, 4th dan in Karate, Master Instructor in Mantis Style, and Urasenke Tea Ceremony certification. Languages: English, French...

Older agent.: Fluent in German, Dutch, and Swahili. Nothing in particular. While loving birds, animals, and children, there is a tendency to hate cats. Prefers eating standing up, particularly “Ten-tama soba 🍥 “

older agent. panting heavily

Lazy agent: prefers eat standing up?

Hungry agent: I’m hungry...

Older agent. You guys... I went to all that trouble to read a long-winded piece of writing...

Younger agent: I was listening carefully. So basically, he was a guy who went too far. It was precisely because he was a cop that he could wield justice, but without that title, he's nothing but an all-powerful terrorist. What a nuisance.

Lazy agent: I don't want anything to do with such a vicious man.

Hungry agent: I just want to go home already.

Younger agent: I guess... oh, that’s it. You know That saying, ‘no one who hates cats is a good person' really hits the nail on the head, doesn't it?

Older agent: So?

Younger agent: So, that’s it, that's all.

Lazy agent: But seriously, I just don't get it. No matter how you look at it, there's no reason for him to come back.

older agent laughs to himself

Younger agent: "stop that, you’re creeping me out."

Older agent. : What if he's returning with a hidden desire for revenge against the powers that be, or ambitions to rebuild the organization? What then? You greenhorns wouldn't stand a chance against that man.

Younger agent: (laughing) Oh no, what's that?

Lazy agent: It's kinda cool, though.

Younger agent: Sir, don't underestimate the world. What can one person possibly do? Honestly, I’d be more convinced that someone had sent him a telegram saying “Come back home right away”.

Older agent: His parents had already passed away during his student years. He was utterly alone, with no relatives or siblings.

Lazy agent: What about a secret love? Maybe he’s returning home against threat of danger to reunite with his lover. The tabloids would have a field day that with that story!

Older agent.: Unfortunately, he has no special relationships with women.

Hungry agent : Um... I guess he's probably coming back because he got hungry after all.

All fall silent

Wind

Announcer intercom: Flight Luftkatze 703, departing from Netherlands, scheduled to arrive at 10:30 PM——

Older agent.: Here it comes...

Announcer intercom: Due to inclement weather, we expect a delay of about one hour.

Younger agent, last agent, and hungry agent slump down with a thud.

Younger agent: Sir...

Hungry agent: I'm hungry. I want to go home soon.

Lazy agent: I quit. I'm quitting this damn job for sure!"

Older agent.: Cut it out already!

Wind.

The faint roar of jet engine exhaust.

Theme song fades in———

Narrator: A stray dog, one, carrying within him the memory of that turmoil, left behind by the times.

Who will place the silver bell around his neck when he lands?
The long night of cats has only just begun...

Theme Song

Fade Out

While Waiting for the Red Spectacles Night 3

Night of the standing eaters—The Matsuha-ken Standing Eater Murder Case: An Alternative Account

airport

The group shivered as the cold wind howled through the trees.

Lazy agent: Brrrrrrrrr 🥶

Younger agent: This is what they mean by a night that freezes the soul, huh?

Hungry agent: I'm going to freeze

Older agent: Well you see, On nights like this, there's nothing like slurping down hot soba with a generous sprinkle of shichimi pepper while standing.

a moment of silence

Lazy agent: (a whisper) Sir...

Older agent: Huh? Oh, that was very wrong of me to say, my bad.

Younger agent: It's fine since it's just us, but if the director had found out, We'd be screwed.

Older agent: What a rotten time we live in "No Standing Law" pssh

Heavy background music starts

Narrator: “Ordinance Prohibiting the Sale of Light Meals for Standing Consumption”

“Ordinance Prohibiting the Sale of Light Meals While Standing” , commonly known as the Tachinikuhō (Tachikin-ho). It was a special ordinance passed and enacted with unprecedented speed the year following the “Kerberos Incident”. It targeted unsettling spaces where young people seeking disconnection gathered, spaces whose operators often concealed shadowy pasts. The ordinance's primary aim was to purge such spaces, deemed contrary to public order and morals, from urban areas. As a result, standing soba shops, gyudon (beef bowl) restaurants, not to mention supermarket yakisoba counters and standing oden stalls at convenience stores, were effectively outlawed. The law is shrouded in a type of secrecy that has never been fully revealed to the public, but Its penalties are said to include life imprisonment at the highest level, a draconian punishment that far exceeds any prohibition or anti-prostitution ordinance.

Hungry agent: I heard there was a big crackdown in Block B of the Second District yesterday too.

Younger agent: I’m not suppose to say this, but I heard that among the customers that were arrested some were the children of high-ranking, senior prosecutors.

Lazy agent: That’s dangerous

Younger agent: But seriously, why would they go through all that trouble to eat some junk? I like soba too, but if I'm gonna eat it, I want it served in a bamboo basket with fresh shrimp tempura on the side.

Lazy agent: I absolutely have to have the Nekomata Toro Soba. Like, with salmon roe sprinkled on top.

Hungry agent: I'm going for the Okame...

Older agent grins a wry smile

Younger agent: Did I say something funny?

Older agent: Well, even you young folks can probably relate to this too. Even after a romantic date where we had grabbed some gratin around Roppongi, I somehow still felt empty and unsatisfied.

At times like that, I'd have a bowl of standing-style soba at the entrance of the private railway station I'd just reached. The scent of rich broth and cheap soy sauce. The sensation of that dog-eyed soba, slurping with my face buried in the steam at the open-air counter. It wasn't about the flavor or the bowl. It was that fleeting moment when the distant memory returned—when satisfying hunger was one and the same as satisfying the soul. Standing-style soba is the homeland of the heart, the origin of eating. When one trades cash for food on the street corner, one touches the very essence of one's existence...

Younger agent: Here we go again

Hungry agent: When it comes to that topic, you really get fired up, don't you?

Lazy agent: Come to think of it, wasn't the incident that directly led to the disbandment of the "Special Investigative Unit", also at a standing soba noodle shop?

Younger agent: Oh, I heard about that at training too. But I think is was... "The Murder at Matsuha-ken News Agency"

Older agent: (sharp tone) It wasn't a news outlet. To be precise. It was the "Matsuha-ken Standing Eater Murder Case" ...though the name "Standing Eater" has been erased from the official records too.

The "Matsuha-ken Standing Eater Murder Case"... It was a heinous incident that ignited the series of events leading to the subsequent dissolution of the Special Investigation Unit. It was also a major scandal that exposed to the world the long-rumored collusion between members of the Special Investigation Unit and a group of underworld figures known as the "Standing Eaters." The incident occurred in February 1995. It was a cold night with snow flurries. At the time, the Special Investigation Unit had several designated informants. One of them, Hayashi Masashi (38), known as "Masashi the Cold Soba Slurper," had been summoned that day by a certain unit member to the standing soba shop "Matsuha-ken" in front of Kinshicho Station. What began as a peaceful meal combined with an exchange of information soon turned into an argument over soba trivia. A minor misunderstanding caused the member to fly into a rage, and he struck the other man hard on the

head with the donburi bowl he was holding. Unfortunately, the arm strength of a Special Investigation Unit member, who constantly wore reinforced clothing, far exceeded that of an ordinary person. That single blow killed "Masashi the Cold Soba Slurper" The body was immediately subjected to a judicial autopsy, which determined the cause of death to be cerebral contusion due to a depressed fracture of the temporal bone and massive subarachnoid hemorrhage.

The incident transcended a single officer's misconduct, causing public opinion to boil over against the Special Investigation Unit, which had long faced criticism for its ruthless investigative tactics. This ultimately led to the unit's dissolution.

Older agent: There's no concrete evidence... at least not yet. However, the investigator handling the case at the time had uncovered evidence that “Masashi the Cold Soba Slurper” had made contact with a certain individual within the Public Prosecutor's Office on multiple occasions. However, he remained silent after being pressured and reprimanded by his superior. The publisher of the radical, red newspaper 'Howl,' which had attempted to expose this, mysteriously disappeared and was later found dead under suspicious circumstances.

Younger agent: Sir, How do you know about that?

Older agent: Well, the investigative reporter that was silenced was a friend of mine... let’s just leave it at that.

Narrator: Regardless of the truth, this incident would become the catalyst that drastically altered the course of history: “Disbandment of the Special Investigation Unit”, “The Cerberus Riots”, And then to the enactment of the Anti-Standing Law——

Older agent: The timing of the Special Investigation Unit's dissolution coinciding with the enactment of the “Standing Prohibition Act” was no coincidence. The Public Prosecutor's Office wanted to eradicate the premodern tendencies within the police organization, symbolized by the ties between the Special Investigation Unit and the standing-eaters. The freeloaders who turned their backs on civil society and dwelled in history's darkest corners, and the Special Investigation Unit that flaunted its own power within the massive police apparatus, charging headlong down a path of violence. In the end, one side cut down excessive justice, only to turn the blade on heretics as well... Power must always walk the middle path, after all. They got what they wanted.

Lazy agent: That name

Older agent: What is it?

Lazy agent: what exactly is this “standing eater” that you keep mentioning.

Older agent: I see... You lot who talk about tempura shrimp at Okame's Soba... no wonder you've never heard of the standing-eaters. Let me tell you the legend of those proud, solitary men who lived on in the dark corners of the city's food culture history... We've got plenty of time before that fellow of theirs shows up.

Background Music——The excitement builds up all at once

Narrator: A stray dog, one, carrying within him the memory of that turmoil, left behind by the times.
Who will place the silver bell around his neck when he lands?
The long night of the cats continues...

* And so the song swells, building to a crescendo.*

fade out

While Waiting for the Red Spectacles Fourth Night

Fourth Night: "The Night of the Street Food Eaters—Master, Will You Become a Mythical Being?"

Airport

Older agent:"What was that we talking about again?"

Staff Member B: "ah, standing-eaters... standing-eaters, the virtues of standing-eating!"

Staff Member A: "That's it. (Suddenly somber) It was the lonely tale of those sad men—"

Background Music rises solemnly and mournfully.

Narrator: The origins of standing-style eating are said to date back to medieval street vendors. It is believed that the origins of the standing-eating freeloader—who nitpicks the food served, overwhelms the owner with smooth talk, and leaves without paying—follow the same path.

The first historical appearance of these enigmatic men is generally accepted to be during the Kan'ei era, with the third-generation proprietor of Nihachi Soba in Shitaya Ikebata, Edo, known as Tokisoba Kanemon, regarded as their progenitor. According to notes by the national scholar Ogyū Sōrai: “They stand by the water's edge, lecturing their hosts, then depart without paying. These are called standing eaters. The thoroughfare is their livelihood. They often deceive the unsuspecting.” This indicates that the basic pattern of their behavior was already established by that time. As time passed, though descriptions of them appeared more frequently in the shadows of official histories, their lifestyle remained fundamentally that of wandering people rejecting settled life. The full picture remained largely unknown until the publication of the laborious work by the unconventional folklorist, Inukai Kiichi, 'The Genealogy of Pottery: The World of the Tachigui'.

However, his research was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. The period following the so-called "Golden Age II," established with the black market as its new stage—the era dubbed the "Big Bread of Street Food"—and extending through the period of high economic growth, remains a historical blank spot. Only recently, through individual studies of several street food vendors who supported this era, has the excavation of this missing link barely begun. This world, resilient in recession and particularly adept at producing outstanding figures at historical junctures and turning points, has now become a book hole in modern folklore studies, with no one seeking its whereabouts in this era of relative prosperity."

Older agent: "But they lived on. Without severing their bloodline, they turned their backs on the main streets swaying with fleeting prosperity. They roamed the corners of back alleys, the depths of desolate regional cities, leaving their footprints like those proud, fierce birds of prey that occasionally descend from the distant blue sky, striking fear into people. Though unknown to those living peaceful, orderly lives, not a day passed without whispers of them among those who sold food on the streets—from takoyaki stall vendors to executives in the food service industry. —Rising from the black markets immediately after the war, supporting that second golden age, hailed as the founder of a revival, yet vanishing abruptly in the year of the Tokyo Olympics: “Ketsune Yatsunuki no Ryū (Fox Yatsunuki the Dragon)” and his beautiful apprentice “Ketsune Korokke no Ogin (Fox Croquette Ogin)”. The "Philosopher of Hamburgers," who single-handedly stormed the foreign-

owned restaurant industry and sent shockwaves through America's fast-food sector. The man who turned the three great slogans of "Fast, Cheap, Delicious" against them, driving that chain into bankruptcy: "Gyūdon's Gyūgorō." The "Sweet Taro of Rotating Cakes," who utterly crushed the Kanto Large-Sized Pan-Cake Federation's Kansai expansion. The mysterious Indian man, "Medium-Spicy Sabu," who mastered the art of disguise. "Megumi of Yūko-Yaki" and "Mami of Crepes," who halted the fashionization of eateries in the Harajuku area... —And then there was the peerless standing eater, “Ginji of Tsukimi”, who claimed the title of genius and was hailed as a masterpiece born from a thousand years of standing eatery history.

Lazy agent: Oh, that’s names familiar...

Older agent : "The legendary standing-eater, “Tsukimi no Ginji”... A man who raced through the dark history of standing-eating like a whirlwind, rewriting every record, and never ceased to stare into the hell of food culture. Shrouded in mystery from his nationality to his blood type, this undefeated pro sent shockwaves through half a million standing soba shops nationwide with his name alone.

His eye technique, instantly discerning the exquisite meeting of cold egg and hot broth, along with his famous line “Clouds Gathering Around the Moon”, had reportedly reached the realm of the divine..."

Younger agent: Scary bastards, weren't they... Well, but now that the Standing Soba Ban has wiped out the standing soba shops themselves, they're like land kappa, guerrillas who've lost the sea of the people. Even Ginji, by now...

Older agent: No, he's still alive. And as long as he lives, standing soba pros will continue to exist on this earth. On nights when clouds drift past the full moon hanging in the sky, and distant dog howls ride the wind, his tall shadow stands silently before the shop curtain.

Lazy agent: So he was a romantic, huh?

Older agent: That's what the testimony from the smoked noodle vendor busted last week said. At a certain underground noodle shop, clad in a jet-black cloak, standing tall and poised at the counter with a perfect 7:3 stance—that flawless posture, that elegant chopstick technique... it was undoubtedly Ginji himself... And in those sharp eyes, staring into the bowl's depths, there was the clear, sorrowful hue of a solitary bird of prey, the last of its kind on earth, soaring through the vast, lonely sky above the human world."

Hungry agent: What?

Older agent: You'd never understand, you Chips Age kids.

Lazy agent: That's an exaggeration.

Younger agent: It's just soba, isn't it?

Older agent: "Yes, just soba. A world where you stand frozen at a counter in the biting cold, trading grimy coins for a bowl full of fillers. It's no world of gourmet this or traditional that. But precisely because of that, there are lives staked on that single bowl of soba—lives that stake their entire existence on fierce battles with the shop owner, competing over technique and spouting endless knowledge. Enduring long, harsh training, throwing themselves into a wandering journey with no end in sight, no home to return to, no parents, no friends to share a cup with. In this world of fleeting encounters, do you want to know my name? Ah, does anyone know the heart of the water a hundred feet below—"

Hungry agent: "Sir, are you crying?"

Older agent: What's this Standing Prohibition Law? I absolutely hate you Tachinikuhō (Tachikin-ho)!

Younger agent: "Sir, get ahold of yourself and keep it down. The Director's here on a business trip. If he overhears, the disciplinary committee—"

Older agent: "Shut up! This story's far from over!"

Background Music suddenly intensifies—

narrator: A stray dog, adrift in time, bearing the memory of that turmoil within. Who will place the silver bell around his neck when he lands? The long night of the cats... continues on..."

Theme song, intensifying

While Waiting for the Red Spectacles Fourth Night

The Night of the Standing-Eater——Master, is there a myth forming?

Airport

Older agent:"What was that we talking about again?"

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Younger agent: Scary bastards, weren't they... Well, but now that the Standing Soba Ban has wiped out the standing soba shops themselves, they're like land kappa, guerrillas who've lost the sea of the people. Even Ginji, by now...

Older agent: No, he's still alive. And as long as he lives, standing soba pros will continue to exist on this earth. On nights when clouds drift past the full moon hanging in the sky, and distant dog howls ride the wind, his tall shadow stands silently before the shop curtain.

Lazy agent: So he was a romantic, huh?

Older agent: That's what the testimony from the smoked noodle vendor busted last week said. At a certain underground noodle shop, clad in a jet-black cloak, standing tall and poised at the counter with a perfect 7:3 stance—that flawless posture, that elegant chopstick technique... it was undoubtedly Ginji himself... And in those sharp eyes, staring into the bowl's depths, there was the clear, sorrowful hue of a solitary bird of prey, the last of its kind on earth, soaring through the vast, lonely sky above the human world."

Hungry agent: Really?

Older agent: You'd never understand, you digital age kids.

Lazy agent: That's an exaggeration.

Younger agent: It's just soba, isn't it?

Older agent: "Yes, just soba. A world where you stand frozen at a counter in the biting cold, trading grimy coins for a bowl full of fillers. It's no world of gourmet this or traditional that. But precisely because of that, there are lives staked on that single bowl of soba—lives that stake their entire existence on fierce battles with the shop owner, competing over technique and spouting endless knowledge. Enduring long, harsh training, throwing themselves into a wandering journey with no end in sight, no home to return to, no parents, no friends to share a cup with. In this world of fleeting encounters, do you want to know my name? Ah, does anyone know the heart of the water a hundred feet below—"

Hungry agent: "Sir, are you crying?"

Older agent: What's this Standing Prohibition Law? I absolutely hate you Tachinikuhō (Tachikin-ho)!

Younger agent: "Sir, get ahold of yourself and keep it down. The Director’s here on a business trip. If he overhears, the disciplinary committee—"

Older agent: "Shut up! This story's far from over!"

Background Music suddenly intensifies—

narrator: A stray dog, adrift in time, bearing the memory of that turmoil within. Who will place the silver bell around his neck when he lands? The long night of the cats... continues on..."

Theme song, intensifying

Fifth Night: "The Night of the Standing Eaters—Will the Dog Descend into the Darkness of Battle?"

* Airport——*

Older agent: "By the way, what were we talking about again?"

Younger agent: So, we were talking about standing eateries. “Tsukimi no Ginji”'s.

Older agent: "(Sharp tone) Don't you dare call it that!"

The theme of the “Standing Eater” starts——

Narrator: The Standing Soba Noodle Shop Prohibition Act, enacted simultaneously with the dismantling of the Special Investigation Unit.

Though seemingly vanishing from the streets after being outlawed, the standing soba noodle shops never truly perished. Nevertheless, forced underground by their illegal status, these standing soba shops inevitably became criminal dens. Moreover, the soaring prices inevitably eroded the spiritual soil that had nurtured the standing soba professionals—the very foundation of the time-honored tradition dating back to the "time soba" era, where customers and owners would wager the price of a bowl of soba, pitting their skills and wits against each other. Trouble erupted at underground soba shops across the land. Even the artisan-minded owners who had recognized their skill and continued to view their existence as a mirror for their own craft began quitting one after another. In

every sense, the standing soba professionals had entered a harsh "winter era."

Older agent: There was no way for the standing soba masters to survive. Except for one path.

Lazy agent: What was it?

Older agent: "Illegal standing-eater soba shops were also breeding grounds for criminals. Naturally, all manner of criminal information circulated there. For those who seek their livelihood there, such information is like gossip that seeps in even if you plug your ears. And that information is absolutely essential for certain organizations."

Younger agent: "Informants...?"

Older agent: "You could say standing-eaters inherently possessed all the prerequisites for that line of work. It wasn't their intention, but... the times were bad. The timing to lift zōpa from the broth, the keen eye to gauge the perfect temperature from the firmness of the egg when the dashi hits it, the sharp palate to discern the meat blend from the juices spreading in your mouth when you bite into a hamburger, the banter over the consistency of udon dough for kōriyaki... While these are the secrets of their craft, they hold no value or meaning to the general public.

When men who’ve staked their lives on mastering such a system of skills and knowledge were forbidden from practicing it, what other path could they possibly have taken?"

Younger agent: "Even the murdered “Masashi the Cold Soba Slurper”...?

Older agent: Come to think of it, he was a pitiful man too... He was obsessed with a peculiar skill—one only useful in summer—instantly judging the amount of vinegar drizzled onto a 'Chilled Tanuki' from the shop owner's motion. So that night of the incident, knowing it was a snow-flurried winter, he couldn't help but show off in front of the special investigation team members and ordered a “Cold Tanuki”. For him, it might have been a self-mocking gesture, a bowl full of dregs for his own decline... But that provoked the anger of ‘Him’, who had always held respect and sympathy for the standing-eaters.

Lazy agent: I hear Masashi’s skull shattered like a pumpkin, didn't it?

Hungry agent: Eww!

Older agent: "...But, but still, that man alone, that “Tsukimi no Ginji” alone, was different. He survived this winter era of standing-eats solely through his own skill. Amid countless professionals turning traitor one after another, he held his ground as a noble holdout, single-handedly challenging the standing-eater syndicate that had gone full-blown organized crime. Though sometimes beaten senseless by enraged craftsmen, he was the last man standing, defending the pride and spirit of the standing-eaters.

Why did that man...

Younger agent: Huh?

Older agent: Netherlands departure, 10:30 PM arrival, Flight Luftkatz 703. Former Special Investigation Unit vanguard member, Totsume Beni, is returning to this city... This is Ginji's final report.

Younger agent: But... but why?

Wind.

Older agent: They say Ginji didn't ask for payment or protection... Why would a man who stayed here and refused to renounce his beliefs betray another man who also refused to renounce his beliefs by leaving this place?

*Older agent clicks his lighter and lights a cigarette.🚬 *

Older agent: No, maybe I understand it all too well.

A transmission comes in on the handheld radio.

Younger agent: This is Point C... Roger, executing immediately.

Older agent: What's going on?

Younger agent: Luftkatze 703 made an emergency landing in Anchorage due to engine trouble. Passengers transferred to Flight 901 departing from there and are heading this way. However, the passenger manifest shows no record of the name in question."

Older agent: Estimated arrival time?

Younger agent: 23:35. North Finger... Sir, could it be... that Ginji's information itself is a hoax?

Older agent: "No, he'll definitely come. I'm heading to North Finger first. You guys contact the lobby crew and follow later.

All other agents: Yes, sir!

The sound of Older agent's footsteps as he ran off.

Younger agent: (Over radio) This is Matsui at West Finger... Yes, the team leader is heading to North Finger now. As the Director said, the informant and Totsume Beni herself show signs of excessive emotional involvement. Assigning us to rear support seems wise... Yes, the arriving flight is Flight 703 as scheduled. Roger, we'll continue the mission here.

Lazy agent: He's a good guy, though.

Younger agent: Stupid man... The days of eating on the roadside with gleaming eyes are long gone.

Airport Announcer: ...Attention please. Flight 703 from Netherlands via An-Rikureji, operated by Luftkatze, will arrive without incident. Estimated arrival time is one hour and five minutes behind schedule, at 23:35...

The station staff suddenly perk up.

Younger agent: Listen up. We don't kill him. We capture him alive. No exceptions!

Lazy agent: He's here!

*The sound of engines approaching from above... Then, carried on the wind perhaps, distant yet close, the howling of dogs echoes across the airport. Growing louder, louder still, like a chorus of

cursed prayers—*

The theme song swells to a crescendo.

Fade out

The End